

# Groups rush to aid Las Vegas victims as others gear up

By Nicole Raz Las Vegas Review-Journal  
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A woman walks past a mural nearby a memorial at the Las Vegas Community Healing Garden in Las Vegas, Monday, Oct. 16, 2017, honoring the victims of the Route 91 Harvest Festival mass shooting. Joel Angel Juarez Las Vegas Review-Journal @jajuarezphoto



A memorial at the Las Vegas Community Healing Garden in Las Vegas, Monday, Oct. 16, 2017, honoring the victims of the Route 91 Harvest Festival mass shooting. Joel Angel Juarez Las Vegas Review-Journal @jajuarezphoto



Steve Adams of Colorado and Henderson, 68, left, visits a memorial at the Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas sign in Las Vegas, Monday, Oct. 16, 2017, honoring the victims of the Route 91 Harvest Festival mass shooting. Joel Angel Juarez Las Vegas Review-Journal @jajuarezphoto

Henderson resident Shannon Fleming is raising money for Las Vegas shooting victims but she doesn't know what to do with the money.

"There's got to be a way to get money to victims now," Fleming said.

There is for Las Vegas resident Dustin Hoots, 33, who has been collecting prepaid credit cards, gift cards to specific grocery stores, supplies and delivering them to first responders and hospitals, as well as helping to pay bills for shooting victims.

"I'm trying to help the victims and families who can't work right now because they got shot," Hoots said. "I'm paying power bills and groceries and there's supposed to be millions of dollars in a fund somewhere, it's kind of concerning."

Hoots and his team of around 20 call themselves the Helpful Hoodlums. Hoots estimates his team and another 20 to 30 volunteers have given about \$2,300 in gift cards and prepaid credit cards to shooting victims and families and up to 900 cases of water and around 4,000 hot meals.

"We're all just running around and trying to fill the gaps," he said.

But collecting and distributing money is complicated. Hoots said he is staying away from collecting cash donations for now.

Bob Grossman, a former IRS Senior Trial Attorney and currently a tax attorney at the Tax Law Center in Las Vegas, said entities without 501(c)(3) status can accept money, that money is just not tax deductible. Grossman said it is wise to set up a separate fund with a nonprofit 501(c)(3) tax status, so contributions can be tax deductible and there are people accountable for making fund distribution decisions. Nonprofit 501(c)(3) entities must have a board of directors.

Hoots said he is in the process of preparing his application to get 501(c)(3) tax status.

### **Applications abound**

It's not just Hoots who is heeding Grossman's advice.

The Nevada Resort Association is preparing to file an application with the IRS for a 501(c)(3) for the creation of the VegasStrongFund.

The VegasStrongFund will pool resources from casino companies and will focus on "assisting victims and strengthening the community infrastructure needed to respond to — and begin healing from — this horrific event (on Oct. 1)," according to Virginia Valentine, president of the Nevada Resort Association. The fund was created on Oct. 6.

[Several casinos have pledged at least \\$8 million](#), but haven't yet said where the funds will go.

"Vegas Strong Fund is a domestic nonprofit corporation seeking tax-exempt status as a charitable organization. Contributions are voluntary and are not limited to resort association members," Valentine said.

Jan Jones-Blackhurst, executive vice president of public policy and corporate responsibility at [Caesars Entertainment Corp.](#), said Thursday that she is serving as vice chairwoman of the board created for the VegasStrongFund. Other board members are:

- Scott Nielson, chairman of the board and president of Nielson Consulting, LLC.
- Kim Sinatra, executive vice president of the board and general counsel for [Wynn Resorts](#), Ltd.
- Andy Abboud, senior vice president of government relations for the Las Vegas Sands Corp.
- Jeffrey Welch, executive vice president and chief legal officer at Red Rock Resorts.
- Erin McMullen, director of governmental affairs at [Boyd Gaming](#).

— Virginia Valentine, secretary/treasurer of the board and president of the Nevada Resort Association.

Jones-Blackhurst said the board is still finalizing details of exactly what the funds will be used for and how the funds will be distributed, she said. The goal of having the fund is to make sure funds can be used to help shooting victims as well as to bolster community needs.

“We just want to make sure that we will be able to give back in a comprehensive form,” Jones-Blackhurst said.

Clark County is also working with a group to try to create a nonprofit 501(c)(3) on its behalf. County spokesman Dan Kulin said Wednesday that the county does not have the statutory authority to create its own 501(c)(3). Clark County management is currently working to get a local committee formed to manage the process of distributing money in the Las Vegas Victims’ Fund online at GoFundMe as well as in a bank account hosted by Bank of Nevada, totalling more than \$12.2 million combined as of Thursday. All of the funds in that pool of money are slated to go directly to shooting victims and families.

### **Next in line**

But getting the IRS to clear those 501(c)(3) status applications is going to take a while. Grossman said it usually takes the IRS between three and six months to approve applications.

“This matter to the government is no more important than any other urgent matter. There are people who went through a hurricane in Florida. There are people who went through a hurricane in Texas. There are other tragic circumstances that the government has got to look at,” Grossman said.

Grossman added that the vetting process for those 501(c)(3)s is also serious business.

“The vetting process to get those application should give ease of mind to the donors that the charity is what it says it is,” he said.

Fleming said she wants answers. Who will get the money? How much will be given? When can victims and families get the help that they need?

“The way I see it, even if the state or the city has to come out of pocket to start helping families, they can always get reimbursed through that fund at a later date, as long as they get the money now to help the families out,” Fleming said. “If you have a husband that was the sole provider and now the wife is left without any income whatsoever and has a family, that money needs to help take care of them. We don’t want that money to be stuck for six months.”

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